

Development of the Shāradā Alphabet 14th-16th Centuries

The development of the Shāradā alphabet upto the 13th century A.D. has been discussed above. In the following period the alphabet displays conspicuous development in the records of Chamba and adjoining hill tracts and shapes of a few letters appear in such an altered form that the alphabet has been given a separate name *Devāshesha*. The detailed treatment of the *Devāshesha* would be given in a separate section and presently we shall discuss the development of the Shāradā alphabet in the 14th and the subsequent centuries on the basis of the following inscriptions of Kashmir and NWFP (Pakistan).

1. The Kotiher (Kashmir) stone slab inscription of the reign of Shahabadena (Shihāb-ud-din) dated (*Laukika*) *sam* (44)45 (A.D. 1369)¹.
2. The Bhuwaneshvari (Khonamuh, Kashmir) stone inscription of the reign of Jayanolahadēna shaha (Zain-ul-abi-din) dated Kali 4530 (A.D. 1428)².
3. The Peshawar (NWFP Pakistan) Museum Inscription of Vanhadaka, dated (*Laukika*) *sam* (4)538 (A.D. 1462)³.
4. The Hariparbat (Srinagar, Kashmir) grave stone inscription of the reign of Mahammadushaha (Mahammad Shah) dated (*Laukika*) *sam* (45)60 (A.D. 1484)⁴.
5. The Wular-hama (Vejebror, Kashmir) bath room gate inscription⁵.
6. The Zaji-nai (Dist Doda, Jammu) stone inscription⁶.

Details of Forms

I. Vowels (See table No. 4)

1. The initial *a* is generally closed at the top except in one case in the Kotiher inscription (col. I) and the Peshawar Museum inscription (col. III) where the letter occurs in its earlier form with an open top. In the Khonamuh inscription (col. II) the letter has only one curve attached directly to the top bar instead of the usual two.
2. The peculiar form of *ā* with a loop in the left limb is noticed in the Hariparbat inscription (col. IV). In the Zaji Nai inscription the letter shows an upward

stroke in place of usual curve at the foot of the right hand vertical. In both cases the letter occurs with a closed top.

3. The initial *i* occurs only in the Khonamuh inscription (col. II) and displays significant development. The earlier two dots above the curve are converted into a small angular curve facing downwards.
4. The initial *i* is found only in the Peshawar Museum Inscription (col. III) and has same shape as in the Baijnath Shiva Temple inscription noted above except that the letter has an unusual tail attached to it not found in the earlier record.
5. The initial *u* remains unchanged.
6. No instances of initial *ū* and *r* are provided by our inscriptions.
7. The initial *e* occurs only in the Hariparbat grave stone inscription (col. IV) and shows marked development with the earlier wedge or small downstroke converted into a full fledged vertical.
8. The initial *ai* does not occur in our records.
9. The initial *o* occurs in the syllable *om* in the Kotiher inscription (col. I) and Peshawar inscription (col. III) and shows the same development as the initial *e*, viz., the wedge at the left top end converted into a vertical stroke.
10. No example of initial *au* is found in our inscription.

Consonants

Gutturals

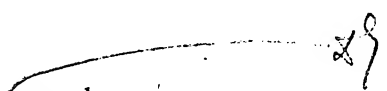
11. The *aksara k* occurs regularly in double looped form in all our records except the Peshawar Museum inscription (col. III) where it still preserves its earlier form with a single loop.
12. The letter *kh* with a well developed vertical on the left preserves its earlier shape and does not present any thing remarkable.
13. *g* also occurs in its earlier forms and shows either a wedge or a small triangle or an upward stroke at the lower end of the left vertical. An uncommon form occurs in the Kotiher inscription (col. I).

14. *gh* also not present anything remarkable except that it shows a typical angular form in the Peshawar Museum Inscription (col. III).
15. The guttural nasal which as usual occurs only in ligatures with other gutturals preserves its earlier form with a wedge, knob or a ^{serif} small triangle at the right end of the top bar.

Palatals

16. *c* occurs only in the quadrangular form and shows a circular loop in the left limb in the Wularhama (col. V) and Khonamuh inscriptions (col. II).
17. *ch* occurs in a typical angular form in the Khonamuh inscription (col. II).
18. *j* also occurs in its earlier forms.
19. *jh* a rare character does not occur in our inscriptions.
20. A developed form of *n* is found in the Khonamuh inscription (col. II) where the earlier wedge at the left top end has developed into a vertical stroke as in the case of *e* and *o* noted above.

Cerebrals

21. *t* and *th* displays  no change.
22. No significant change is noticed in *d* as well.
23. *dh* occurs only in the Khonamuh inscription (col. II) and shows a loop in place of the more common kink at the right end of the base horizontal.
24. Of the two forms of *ṇ* noticed in the earlier records above, only one is more commonly found in our inscription, viz, that without the left hand tail. In the Kotihar (col. I) and Khonamuh (col. II) inscriptions the letter occurs in a typical angular form where we have in place of the usual curves three downstrokes suspended from the top horizontal bar.

Dentals

25. *t* does not present anything remarkable except that in the Hariparbat (col. IV) and the Wular Hama (col. V) inscriptions the letter shows a loop in the middle

as noticed earlier above in the Bhakund inscription (table 3 col. III). An unknown form is found in the Kotiher inscription (col. I) line 7 where the lower curve has been attached directed to the top bar. *directly*

26. *th* occurs only in quadrangular form. Its shape is similar to that of *ɣ* with the difference that it has its top closed by means of horizontal bar while the latter has its top open.
27. *d* develops a knob or a loop on the left in the Peshawar (col. III) Hariparbat (col. IV) and Wular Hama (col. IV) inscriptions. The uncommon forms are seen in the Peshawar and Hariparbat inscriptions where the usual small upward stroke on the right of the base stroke has been developed into a vertical lengthened downwards.
28. *dh* shows regularly a well developed top bar.
29. *n* does not present anything remarkable except that the letter shows an unusually long vertical in the Hariparbat inscription (col. IV).

Labials

30. *p* retains its earlier form and shows no change.
31. *ph* occurs only in the Zaji Nai Inscription (col. VI) where the curve instead of turning inside turns sharply round.
32. *b* is usually represented by *v*. A distinction in their forms is, however noticeable in the Hariparbat inscription (col. IV) where *b* is rounded in shape as compared to *v* which is angular.
33. The form of *bh* remains constant except that it shows a loop in the middle in the Wularhama inscription (col. V) in place of the usual wedge as in the Bhakund inscription above.
34. The form of *m* remains essentially the same but for a few peculiarities that it displays in some of our records. Thus it shows a circular loop in the left limb in the Wularhama (col. V) and a Knob in the Peshawar (col. III) and Hariparbat (col. IV) inscriptions.

Semi - vowels

35. *y* occurs with a close top except in the Peshawar museum inscription (col. III) where it retains its earlier form with an open top. In the Khonamuh Inscription (col. II) it shows an inward stroke issuing from the left top end, similar to one found in the early Shāradā manuscripts. An uncommon cursive form occurs in the Kotihar inscription (col. I).

36. *r* with a wedge or a triangular ^{loop} at the lower end of the left shows no marked change.

37. *l* also in essential features remains the same.

38. *v* which also represents *b* occurs in both angular and cursive forms.

Sibilants

39. The form of *sh* does not differ materially from the earlier form. It shows as usual a wedge or a small triangle in the left limb. In the Kotihar inscription (col. I) the wedge is sometimes less defined.

40. *ṣ* does not display any significant development. An uncommon form occurs in the Hariparbat inscription (col. IV).

41. *s* displays the same characteristics as *sh* but is open at the top.

Spirants

42. A somewhat developed form of *h* occurs in the Peshawar Museum inscription (col. III) which closely agrees with the modern *h* of the Devanāgarī. In our other records its form remains constant.

43. *Jihvāmūliya* does not occur in the records under reference.

44. *Upadhmāniya* occurs in the Kotihar (col. I) and Khonamuh (Col. II) inscriptions and its shape is similar that of angular *ṇ* described above with a horizontal bar below.

Virāma

45. Virāma which usually occurs after *m* and *t* shares the features of the earlier

period. In the Khonamuh inscription (col. II) however, it consist of a long vertical attached to the consonant on the right side. The final *m* with *virāma* appears in modified form in Peshawar inscription (col. III) while final *t* in the Khonamuh inscription (col. II) retains its complete form.

Medial Vowels

1. The methods of expressing the medial \bar{a} continue to be the same as in the earlier records. In *ja* in the Kotiher (col. I) and Wularhama (col. V) inscriptions the small vertical denoting medial \bar{a} has been prolonged downwards to touch the central horizontal stroke. A small circle denotes the medial \bar{a} in $\bar{n}\bar{a}$ and $\bar{n}\bar{a}$ in the Kotiher (col. I) and the Khonamuh (col. II) inscriptions. *respectively.*
2. Medial *i* and \bar{i} are rendered as usual by curves drawn respectively to the left and right of the consonant. The curve of medial *i* in the Wularhama inscription (col. V) is comparatively shorter and presents an archaic appearance.
3. Medial *u* is expressed in the older fashion, viz., by a wedge, a small triangle or by a curve at the lower end of the consonant.
4. Medial \bar{u} is rendered as usual by the subscript initial \bar{u} or by a horizontal stroke attached to the bottom of the consonant on the left side.
5. Medial *r* occurs mostly in angular form. A form resembling subscript *p* is noticed in *ghr*, l. 2, in the Peshawar Inscription (col. III).
6. Except in the Peshawar Museum Inscription (col. III) medial *e* is rendered throughout by a horizontal stroke placed above the consonant. The *pristhamātrā* has been used in only one case in *ke* (l. 3) in the Peshawar Museum Inscription. In this inscription the stroke of medial *e* continues to be a slanting one as the earlier records.
7. Medial *ai* is rendered throughout by two horizontal *e* strokes placed above the consonant.
8. Medial *o* is rendered more often by the superscribed flourish. In the Khonamuh inscription (col. II) it has also been rendered in earlier fashion by a small downstroke (in place of the usual wedge) at the right top end combined with a superscribed *e* stroke in *Khonamoshe* l. 2.

9. Medial *au* is rendered throughout by the combination of superscribed flourish and the *a* mark.

Ligatures

1. Superscript and subscript *k* continues to have earlier forms, the former with the ancient cross bar form and the latter retaining its complete shape.
2. *ñ* which occurs only in combination with *k* and *g* has an uncommon form in the Peshawar inscription (col. III) line 6 (*ñga*) where the base stroke of *ñ* and the top of *g* have been merged into one.
3. The subscript *ñ* occurs in a developed looped form in the ligatures *ññā* (l. 5) and *ññ* (l. 9) in the Khonamuh inscription (col. II).
4. The subscript *th* is rendered throughout by the S like form with a steamer on the right. An uncommon form occurs in the ligature *rth* in the Khonamuh inscription where the sign consists of a *t* with a steamer attached to it on the right side.
5. *r* as usual loses its bottom part when forming the first member of the ligature. Sometimes it retains its full form as, for example, in *rta* in Peshawar inscription (col. III) and *rma* in Wularhama inscription (col. V). In *rva* in the Khonamuh inscription (col. II) the letter is not inserted in the left limb of *v* but forms a separate component. *ra*
6. Subscript *r* is rendered in the earlier fashions. In ligatures *dra* and *bra* in the Hariparbat inscription (col. IV) it shows uncommon looped form similar to that of subscript *t* or *th*.
7. The subscript *t* and *th* in the ligatures *ṣṭa* and *ṣṭha* is rendered by a loop with a tail attached to it on the right side. A peculiar form occurs in ligature *grṣṭa* in the Peshawar inscription (col. III) where the subscribed *t* has been written as subscript *th*.

This brings our study of the development of the Shāradā alphabet to a close so far as its use in the inscriptions is concerned. No doubt, the use of this alphabet in the inscriptions in Kashmir continued even up to as late as the 18th century as is attested to by the discovery of a Shāradā inscription dated Vikram 1846 (1789 A.D.) by Pt. Anand Kaul,

But since we do not possess the facsimile of the inscription nor is the original traceable now we are not in a position to say what further developments the alphabet displayed in the inscriptions after the 16th century. This much is, however, clear that even in the inscriptions of the 15th and the 16th centuries the development of the Shāradā script is almost complete with the exception of a few letter the final changes in which are noticed in the Shāradā manuscripts a detailed account of which will be given in the next chapter, titled **Shāradā Alphabets in Manuscripts**.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Kaul Deambi, *Corpus of Shāradā Inscriptions of Kashmir* pp. 113 ff. and Plate No. 9.

The inscription is now preserved in the S.P.S. Museum Srinagar. It is scribbled in very bad hand and it is not possible to evaluate each and every character.

2. *Ibid* pp. 119 ff. and Plate No. 10.
3. Sten Konow, *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. X, pp. 79 ff. and Plate.
4. Kaul Deambi, *opcit.* pp. 128 ff. and Plate No. 12.
5. *Ibid* pp. 145 ff. and Plate No. 14.
6. *Ibid* pp. 151-152. The inscription originally found by R.C. Kak is preserved partly in fragments in S.P.S. Museum Srinagar.
7. Kaul Deambi, *Ibid*, pp. 131 f.